

Amendments to the Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for searching a content database stored in computer storage, the content database including a plurality of records each containing multiple field types ~~within a set of field types~~ fields of information, the method comprising the steps of:

~~maintaining a structure database in computer storage in which the set of field types are organized each record is parsed into a plurality of one or more record categories and zero or more sub-categories, each record category having zero or more sub-categories and one or more fields of information, the structure database containing, for each record category, record relationship information indicating information defining the data structure of the record category—categories and sub-categories of the multiple field types of the record and category and sub-category relationships of the multiple field types of the record;~~

~~receiving a search query comprising a selection of multiple field types within the set of field types one or more query categories, each query category comprising zero or more sub-categories and one or more selections from a user;~~

~~determining, query relationship information indicating categories and sub-categories of the multiple field types of the search query and category and sub-category relationships of the multiple field types of the search query for each query category, the data structure of the query category based on the data structure of a corresponding record category;~~

~~for each of one or more records, performing a correlation between the data structure of each query category and the data structure of the corresponding record category query relationship information and the record relationship information for one or more records to produce a relevance value for each of the one or more records the record, wherein performing the correlation comprises:~~

~~for each data structure of a query category, generating a selection tree comprising a node representing the query category, sub-nodes representing the sub-categories and selections, and weights for each node and sub-node assigned based on the selections from the user, and~~

for each data structure of the corresponding record category, generating a data tree comprising a node representing the record category, sub-nodes representing the sub-categories and fields of information, and weights for each node and sub-node assigned based on the level of the node or sub-node in the data tree or based on the selections from the user, and using a correlation algorithm to correlate the weights of the data tree with the weights of the selection tree to produce a relevance value for the corresponding record category; and

as a response to the search query, selecting ~~information from~~ records in the content database based upon the relevance values for the one or more records.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein ~~the correlation step is performed for a record by correlating each of two or more categories in the search query with a corresponding category in the record to produce a relevance value for the category, and determining the relevance value of the record based on the relevance values determined for the two or more categories in the search query~~ relevance value for the corresponding record category indicates a degree of similarity between the weights of the data tree and the weights of the selection tree.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein ~~the correlating step is different for two categories that have different data structures~~ the correlation algorithm comprises a first correlation algorithm for a first type of data structure of a category and a second correlation algorithm for a second type of data structure of a category, wherein the first and second correlation algorithms comprise different algorithms.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Canceled)

6. (Currently Amended) A system for searching a content database stored in computer storage, the content database including a plurality of records each containing multiple field types within a set of field types fields of information, the system comprising:

a structure database in computer storage in which ~~the set of field types are organized each record is parsed into a plurality of one or more record categories and zero or more sub-categories, each record category having zero or more sub-categories and one or more fields of information, the structure database containing, for each record category, record relationship information indicating information defining the data structure of the category categories and sub-categories of the multiple field types of the record and category and sub-category relationships of the multiple field types of the record;~~

a receiver for receiving a search query comprising ~~a selection of multiple field types within the set of field types~~ one or more query categories, each query category comprising zero or more sub-categories and one or more selections from a user;

a determining device for determining, ~~query relationship information indicating categories and sub-categories of the multiple field types of the search query and category and sub-category relationships of the multiple field types of the search query~~ for each query category, the data structure of the query category based on the data structure of a corresponding record category;

a correlation device for performing, ~~for each of one or more records, a correlation between the data structure of each query category and the data structure of the corresponding record category~~ query relationship information and the record relationship information for one or more records to produce a relevance value for each of the one or more records the record, wherein performing the correlation comprises:

for each data structure of a query category, generating a selection tree comprising a node representing the query category, sub-nodes representing the sub-categories and selections, and weights for each node and sub-node assigned based on the selections from the user, and

for each data structure of the corresponding record category, generating a data tree comprising a node representing the record category, sub-nodes representing the sub-categories and fields of information, and weights for each node and sub-node assigned based on the level of the node or sub-node in the data tree or based on the selections from the user, and using a correlation algorithm to correlate the weights of the data tree with the weights of the selection tree to produce a relevance value for the corresponding record category; and

a response unit for responding to the search query by selecting and providing information from records in the content database based upon the relevance values for the one or more records.

7. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 6 wherein the ~~correlation device~~ performs a correlation for a record by correlating each of two or more categories in the search query with a corresponding category in the record to produce a relevance value for the category, and determining the relevance value of the record based on the relevance values determined for the two or more categories in the search query relevance value for the corresponding record category indicates a degree of similarity between the weights of the data tree and the weights of the selection tree.

8. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 6 wherein the correlation ~~device~~ performs a different operation for two categories that have different data structures algorithm comprises a first correlation algorithm for a first type of data structure of a category and a second correlation algorithm for a second type of data structure of a category, wherein the first and second correlation algorithms comprise different algorithms.

9. (Canceled)

10. (Canceled)

11. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 6 provided with access to a network, the content database being accessible from the network, the receiver and response unit communicating over the network.

12. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 11 wherein the content database is accessed through the network.

13. (Currently Amended) In an online user forum of the type permitting communication among a plurality of users and also permitting users to post information content for access by users, the improvement comprising a reputation module storing a reputation rating for a user in association with information content, a user's reputation being a function of the degree of his participation in the forum, said reputation module being included within a system for searching a content database stored in computer storage, the content database including a plurality of records each containing multiple ~~field types within a set of field types~~ fields of information, the system further comprising:

a structure database in computer storage in which ~~the set of field types are organized each record is parsed into a plurality of one or more record categories and zero or more sub-categories, each record category having zero or more sub-categories and one or more fields of information, the structure database containing, for each record category, record-relationship information indicating information defining the data structure of the category categories and sub-categories of the multiple field types of the record and category and sub-category relationships of the multiple field types of the record;~~

a receiver for receiving a search query comprising ~~a selection of multiple field types within the set of field types one or more query categories, each query category comprising zero or more sub-categories and one or more selections from a user;~~

a determining device for determining, ~~query relationship information indicating categories and sub-categories of the multiple field types of the search query and category and sub-category relationships of the multiple field types of the search query for each query category, the data structure of the query category based on the data structure of a corresponding record category;~~

a correlation device for performing, ~~for each of one or more records, a correlation between the data structure of each query category and the data structure of the corresponding record category query relationship information and the record relationship information for one or more records to produce a relevance value for each of the one or more records~~ the record, wherein performing the correlation comprises:

for each data structure of a query category, generating a selection tree comprising a node representing the query category, sub-nodes representing the sub-

categories and selections, and weights for each node and sub-node assigned based on the selections from the user, and

for each data structure of the corresponding record category, generating a data tree comprising a node representing the record category, sub-nodes representing the sub-categories and fields of information, and weights for each node and sub-node assigned based on the level of the node or sub-node in the data tree or based on the selections from the user, and using a correlation algorithm to correlate the weights of the data tree with the weights of the selection tree to produce a relevance value for the corresponding record category; and

a response unit for responding to the search query by selecting and providing ~~information from~~ records in the content database based upon the relevance values for the one or more records.

14. (Previously Presented) The forum of claim 13 wherein the reputation module is constructed so that a first user's reputation rating is dependent upon the evaluation by other users of the information posted by the first user.

15. (Previously Presented) The forum of claim 13 wherein the reputation module is constructed so that a first user's reputation rating is dependent upon his evaluation of information posted by other users.

16. (Previously Presented) The forum of claim 13 wherein the reputation module is constructed so that a first user's reputation rating is dependent more on the evaluation by other users of the information posted by the first user than upon the first user's evaluation of information posted by other users.

17. (Canceled)

18. (Currently Amended) The forum of claim 13 wherein the ~~correlation device performs a correlation for a record by correlating each of two or more categories in the search query with a corresponding category in the record to produce a relevance value for~~

~~the category, and determining the relevance value of the record based on the relevance values determined for the two or more categories in the search query relevance value for the corresponding record category indicates a degree of similarity between the weights of the data tree and the weights of the selection tree.~~

19. (Currently Amended) ~~The forum of claim 13 wherein the correlation device performs a different operation for two categories that have different data structures algorithm comprises a first correlation algorithm for a first type of data structure of a category and a second correlation algorithm for a second type of data structure of a category, wherein the first and second correlation algorithms comprise different algorithms.~~

20. (Canceled)

21. (Canceled)

22. (Previously Presented) The forum of claim 13 provided with access to a network, the content database being accessible from the network, the receiver and response unit communicating over the network.

23. (Previously Presented) The forum of claim 22 wherein the content database is accessed through the network.

24 – 58. (Canceled)

59-67. (Canceled)

68. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein selecting records in the content database comprises selecting any records that have exact matches of the selections from the user and any records that have similar but not exact matches of the selections from the user.

69. (New) The method of claim 2, wherein the relevance value for the record comprises a combination of two or more relevance values for two or more corresponding record categories.

70. (New) The method of claim 3, wherein:
the first type of data structure of a category comprises a hierarchical structure comprising one or more sub-categories; and
the second type of data structure of a category comprises a scalar structure comprising zero sub-categories.

71. (New) The method of claim 70, wherein, for a corresponding record category having the first type of data structure, the generated data tree comprises weights for each node and sub-node assigned based on the level of the node or sub-node in the data tree.

72. (New) The method of claim 70, wherein the first correlation algorithm comprises a cosine coefficient algorithm.

73. (New) The method of claim 70, wherein, for a corresponding record category having the second type of data structure, the generated data tree comprises weights for each node and sub-node assigned based on the selections from the user.

74. (New) The system of claim 6, wherein selecting records in the content database comprises selecting any records that have exact matches of the selections from the user and any records that have similar but not exact matches of the selections from the user.

75. (New) The system of claim 7, wherein the relevance value for the record comprises a combination of two or more relevance values for two or more corresponding record categories.

76. (New) The system of claim 8, wherein:

the first type of data structure of a category comprises a hierarchical structure comprising one or more sub-categories; and

the second type of data structure of a category comprises a scalar structure comprising zero sub-categories.

77. (New) The system of claim 76, wherein, for a corresponding record category having the first type of data structure, the generated data tree comprises weights for each node and sub-node assigned based on the level of the node or sub-node in the data tree.

78. (New) The system of claim 76, wherein the first correlation algorithm comprises a cosine coefficient algorithm.

79. (New) The system of claim 76, wherein, for a corresponding record category having the second type of data structure, the generated data tree comprises weights for each node and sub-node assigned based on the selections from the user.

80. (New) The forum of claim 13, wherein selecting records in the content database comprises selecting any records that have exact matches of the selections from the user and any records that have similar but not exact matches of the selections from the user.

81. (New) The forum of claim 18, wherein the relevance value for the record comprises a combination of two or more relevance values for two or more corresponding record categories.

82. (New) The forum of claim 19, wherein:

the first type of data structure of a category comprises a hierarchical structure comprising one or more sub-categories; and

the second type of data structure of a category comprises a scalar structure comprising zero sub-categories.

83. (New) The forum of claim 82, wherein, for a corresponding record category having the first type of data structure, the generated data tree comprises weights for each node and sub-node assigned based on the level of the node or sub-node in the data tree.

84. (New) The forum of claim 82, wherein the first correlation algorithm comprises a cosine coefficient algorithm.

85. (New) The forum of claim 82, wherein, for a corresponding record category having the second type of data structure, the generated data tree comprises weights for each node and sub-node assigned based on the selections from the user.